III

THE POET AS PATRIOT—SHAKESPEARE TO WORDSWORTH

THE theme of English nationality in English poetry is as comprehensive and various as the poetry itself. No aspect of a literature can be absolutely sundered from the nation that has produced it. Nationality does not determine everything, but in considering a work of literature it is never irrelevant, though it may not be decisive, to say, "An Englishman wrote this, or a Frenchman, or a German." The great cultural movements of western Europe, even before the rise of extreme nationalism during the last century and a half, alter as they cross national boundaries: Chaucer is by no means the equivalent of the French and Italian poets by whom he is influenced; More the humanist is an Englishman; Erasmus the humanist is just as clearly a Dutchman; Boileau and Samuel Johnson may both be called neoclassicists, and share ideas current through the western world, but who is more British than the one or more French than the other?

If we limit the theme of patriotism to formal public utterance, our loss will be great. Panegyric, ode, and oration may nobly sustain the national spirit, but they cannot see a nation through an ordinary day. This contrast between the direct and the oblique expression of nationality applies with particular force to England. Though all generalizations about national character are rash, and can probably be refuted, we may hazard the statement that it is the English

way to attach particular importance to the informal homely sentiments, the silences and elisions, the penumbra and the connotation. To casual observers the Englishman may appear to be a stickler for form and protocol, but as a matter of fact the expression of English nationality in literature is often found between the lines. With due discretion we may apply Kipling's pleasant paradox about the Englishman's conversation:

> In telegraphic sentences, half nodded to their friends,
> They hint a matter's inwardness, and there the matter ends.
> And while the Celt is talking from Valencia to Kirkwall,
> The English—ah, the English!—don't say anything at all.
> ("The Puzzler")

Another difficulty confronts us when we consider the time-span of the national life. Where and when does the expression of nationality begin? The nation comes into existence at some time, yet it must always have had a past. Patriotism lives on tradition, but however far back we go we find ourselves arguing in a circle: tradition forms and is formed by the nation. The full identification of patriotism in its origins must forever elude the student of literature, no matter how refined his analysis. It is well to remember what escapes us, that patriotic words are surcharged with meanings conveyed only to those in the family. While we shall have to quote and weigh texts, we must remind ourselves of the Persian poet's injunction:

> But mark, while gazing at the boughs of speech,
> How much the roots thereof are out of reach.
> (Firdausi, Prelude to *Sháhnáma*)

We can then avoid the vexed problem of the origins of the English nation; we need not set the arguments for a national consciousness before the Norman Conquest over against the theory that builds up the nation step by step

after the Conquest. In his classic essay *On the Continuity of English Prose* (1932) the late R. W. Chambers describes the heroic defense of London against the invading Danes at the end of the tenth century, and speaks of the date, September 8, 994, as "the most glorious day in the long history of London." No friend of England can read those words now without thrilling to the parallel between that day and the crucial week of the Battle of Britain in September, 1940. Is it illusion, or sentiment, or penetrating historical imagination that detects some profound connection between two dogged defensive battles lying nine and a half centuries apart? In spite of such flashes of insight or flights of speculation, we must on the whole be content with what has been handed down to the Englishman of later centuries; a full exploration of the nation's past is impossible. We are concerned with tradition and legend as shaped through the generations. These are in themselves facts of the first importance for the historian. They cannot be dismissed as the baseless fabric of a vision. Those who fear that the nation considered in terms of tradition may be a fabulous monster can reassure themselves when they look at England. The geographical basis is unmistakable; Great Britain is an island, and stands clear of the fluctuating frontiers of the Continent. The three peoples on this island, the English, the Scotch, and the Welsh, have in whatever way by long process of time become a united nation. Great Britain has linguistic unity, despite any qualifications about Welsh, Gaelic, Manx, or Cornish. The nation is not the island or the language, but it cannot be thought of apart from them; it is a foothold for the linking of the generations through tradition. The student of literature (I do not say the historian) may take this tradition at face value.

The poet, then, operates with the established or accepted

version of the national story, and the first great achievement of English poetry in this kind is Elizabethan. The major poets of the fourteenth century, Chaucer and his contemporaries, with all their strong social sense and rich humanity, saw man in terms of religious and feudal loyalties. The right English flavor is there, in Chaucer's shrewd humor and subtle reserve, in Langland's moral indignation and harsh realism, but there is no continuous and self-conscious assertion in literature of a national will, not even in the generation after Chaucer, during Henry V's aggressive and triumphant campaign in France. The Tudor nationalism of the sixteenth century, untroubled by the niceties of historical criticism, took up the story of England triumphant under Henry V, distracted and weakened during the Wars of the Roses, united and militant again under the Tudors, with Henry VII as prologue to the imperial theme and Elizabeth as the culmination of England's glory. Shakespeare's chronicle plays show us history drawn, or if you will distorted, in this perspective; the decorative arts of the Renaissance are used to set it off, as in the progresses of Queen Elizabeth and the poetry of Spenser; the philosophic mind expounds the dignity of the Elizabethan settlement in the stately prose of Hooker. Natural feeling and traditional sentiment are drawn into this orbit: the simple response to drum and trumpet, love of martial glory, attachment to familiar places and ways, the new interest in travel and exploration, the inherited loyalties of chivalry —all have their part. As we look at Elizabethan literature from this point of view, however, we may conclude that the artistic achievement of outright nationalism does not measure up to its urgency and significance. The great formal projects do not quite come off. But if the great national epic had been written, the theme would have been King Arthur

and his return. The Renaissance believed that an epic poet was necessarily a learned man, and to the English epic poet this age assigned the pseudo-scholarly theme of Arthur. After the accession of Henry VII, of the Welsh house of Tudor, patriots took up the stories Geoffrey of Monmouth had told about the descent of the Britons from the Trojan prince Brutus, the triumph of King Arthur, and the prophesied return of a British (not Saxon) line of monarchs, realized in the glories of the reigning dynasty.

> No more our long lost Arthur we bewail.
> All hail, ye genuine kings, Britannia's issue, hail!
> (Thomas Gray, "The Bard")

So Gray summed up the tradition a century and a half later, attesting its vitality. The emphasis was on the British rather than the Saxon side of the national history, and on the pseudo-historical Arthur rather than on the Arthur of the romances. Even critical historians revered the myth. Modern scholarship has shown that this tradition had a decisive effect on the plan of Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* and that it exercised an important influence on the work of other poets as well.[1] Thus the British legend had a prominent place in the mind of the youthful Milton. There was undoubted magic in the British name, even though it was the special property of learned men who wrote long poems and thick folios. It is interwoven in Drayton's elaborate poem of geographical description, the *Poly-Olbion,* and when Drayton writes his famous song on the Battle of Agincourt, the most forceful expression of military patriotism in his age, he significantly heads it, "To the Cambro-Britains and their Harpe." The line between the learned and

[1]Edwin Greenlaw, *Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory* (Baltimore, 1932); Roberta F. Brinkley, *Arthurian Legend in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore, 1932).

the popular cannot be drawn too sharply when we realize that Drayton thought of himself as a British bard in the tradition of Orpheus, David, Pindar, and the Druids. If this British theme seems to us a pedantic engraftment on the national life, we should remember that it stood for union in a new state personified by Elizabeth, and for exultation in newly realized national power after the defeat of the Armada —all this furthermore in contrast to the struggles and dissensions of the fifteenth century, and in opposition to acute dangers that threatened from without. Thus the theme of British unity connects with the theme of the long and disastrous struggle between York and Lancaster, the wounds of civil war. The two are really one, but the second aspect is better known because it is a main subject of Shakespeare's historical plays. Shakespeare did not write political editorials, but no Elizabethan could miss the contemporary application, no patriot could fail to be moved by the theme of ancient struggles and wrongs overpassed, "division and reunion." This patriotic motif passed from the chroniclers Hall and Holinshed to the dramatists. Thomas Heywood, in his *Apology for Actors* (1612) adapts the old doctrine of the moral ends of drama to contemporary patriotism:

> Plays have made the ignorant more apprehensive, taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot read in the discovery of all our English chronicles; and what man have you now of that weak capacity, that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conqueror, nay from the landing of Brute, until this day, being possessed of their true use, for or because plays are writ with this aim, and carried with this method, to teach the subjects obedience to their King, to show the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to allegiance, dehorting them from all traitorous and felonious stratagems.

It will not be oversubtle to make distinctions among Shakespeare's famous patriotic passages, which are still

alive on the lips of Englishmen, and it will be necessary to put them in their context. Only after the defeat of the Armada in 1588 did England face the possibility of entering on a large-scale offensive against Spain. Elizabeth's policy had been and still tended to be defensive. Continental commitments were made reluctantly, and the Queen had shown no great taste for the action against Spain in the Low Countries in 1585 and 1586. This spirit of isolation and self-sufficiency appears in a brief political debate in *3 Henry VI*, dated perhaps 1591:

> *Hastings.* Why, knows not Montague that of itself
> England is safe, if true within itself?
> *Montague.* Yes, but the safer when 'tis back'd with France.
> *Hastings.* 'Tis better using France than trusting France.
> Let us be back'd with God, and with the seas,
> Which he hath giv'n for fence impregnable,
> And with their helps only defend ourselves.
> In them and in ourselves our safety lies. (IV, i, 39–46)

It is this defensive bias of the Englishman in his island fortress which gives such force to the speech of the Bastard Faulconbridge at the end of Shakespeare's *King John:*

> This England never did, nor never shall,
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror
> But when it first did help to wound itself.
> Now these her princes are come home again,
> Come the three corners of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them. Naught shall make us rue
> If England to itself do rest but true. (V, vi, 112–18)

Perhaps the last time these lines were spoken from the stage was in the famous theater near Waterloo Station called the Old Vic. The Old Vic has now been demolished by German bombs, but the lines still ring true and hold good to the end. They are based on a passage in the old play which Shakespeare used, the *Troublesome Reign,* which may date from the Armada time and seems in its anti-

Catholic coloring and its note of defiance to express the tension of that time.

> If England's peers and people join in one,
> Nor Pope, nor France, nor Spain can do them wrong.

With the defeat of the Armada England turns to the attack, and thinks of doing more than "singeing the King of Spain's beard." The outburst of exultant militarism is unmistakable in George Peele's lines addressed to the admirals Norris and Drake when they were dispatched on the great Lisbon expedition in 1589 to give a counterstroke to the Armada:

> To arms, to arms, to glorious arms!
> With noble Norris, and victorious Drake,
> Under the sanguine cross, brave England's badge,
> To propagate religious piety,
> And hew a passage with your conquering swords.
>
> O, ten times treble happy men, that fight
> Under the cross of Christ and England's queen
> And follow such as Drake and Norris are!
> (*A Farewell to Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake*)

A policy of colonization and conquest, re-enforced by the strongest sanctions of church and state, was advocated by Ralegh and Essex, but viewed askance by more cautious politicians like Burghley. Ralegh, Drake, even Essex, afforded nobler matter for the Muse than Burghley, and the greatest of contemporary non-dramatic poets, Edmund Spenser, responded to the imperial vision. But when the vision and the general policy are translated into specific acts, the patriot may find his hopes deferred and his enthusiasm frittered away in muddle and mismanagement. In spite of Peele's exultant lines, the expedition of Drake and Norris was a failure.

This militant phase of Elizabethan patriotism colors Shakespeare's development of the character of Henry V,

the warlike young king who led the sturdy yeomen to victory at Agincourt. If we look at the situation coolly we see in Henry's French campaign a piece of downright aggression worthy of the son of the unscrupulous usurper Bolingbroke and destined to lead the country into the dreary anticlimax of the French wars of the fifteenth century and beyond that to the national tragedy of the Wars of the Roses. Shakespeare's historical imagination took in the whole span; he may have seen the whole period at times as a tragedy of usurpation, with one violation after another of divinely established order in the state. But for the nonce the glory of England's past rests on Henry V, and the contemporary application is unmistakable when we are given to understand in one of the Prologues that the glory of England's present rests on the sword of the Earl of Essex. When we consider the disastrous failure of Essex we realize that a poet or a citizen may be in danger when he puts all his money on one general. Without going too far into the aesthetics of the matter, it is safe to say that patriotic poetry cannot be brought too baldly into juxtaposition with the headlines at a given time. During the terrible week of the crisis leading up to Munich, in September, 1939, an excellent production of *Henry V* was running at Drury Lane. It was acted in that vast theater to a mere handful of spectators, and at times the splendor of the piece seemed mere tinsel; the effect was at once savagely ironical and deeply depressing. Yet the national poets must not be read in the light of the failure of the Earl of Essex, or the doings of the men of Munich. In *Henry V,* besides the imperialism which succeeds only with success, we find also what England will not willingly let die; the warlike Harry's speech to his men on the night before Agincourt is not mere boasting, but an exultant acceptance of battle against odds and a blending of the pomp and cir-

cumstance of war with the shrewd, practical, homely, and humorous. From these same years of militancy comes the best known story in British naval history, the last fight of the *Revenge* and the death of Sir Richard Grenville in the Battle of Flores—"memorable," says Bacon, "even beyond credit, and to the height of some heroical fable." Tennyson, we know, tells it after Sir Walter Ralegh,[1] and we need not rehearse it here. From the annals of an age of imperial hopes England has chosen to remember and to make peculiarly her own a story of desperate resistance against overwhelming odds.

Always more poignant than the theme of national triumph is the theme of England in danger, the patriot's solicitude and affection superseding vainglory. The note is not common in Elizabethan poetry, but we may detect it in Spenser's lines:

> Deare countrey! O how dearely deare
> Ought thy remembraunce and perpetual band
> Be to thy foster childe, that from thy hand
> Did commun breath and nouriture receave!
> How brutish is it not to understand
> How much to her we owe, that all us gave,
> That gave unto us all, what ever good we have!
>
> (*Faerie Queene,* II, x, 69)

In *Richard II* the dying John of Gaunt laments the pass to which the folly of the king has brought his country, but this lamentation sets off the most famous words in praise of England ever uttered by any of her poets:

> This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,

[1]Tennyson, "The Revenge"; Ralegh, *A Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Iles of Açores* (1591).

> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house,
> Against the envy of less happier lands;
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.
> (II, i, 40–50)

The whole passage is lyrical, and may be compared to a great aria in an opera; the full volume of its energy and rhythm dominates the minor strain of lamentation for England, and also more than counterbalances the beautifully written lyric debate on exile in which philosophic consolation is recommended to Bolingbroke:

> All places that the eye of heaven visits
> Are to a wise man ports and happy havens.
> (I, iii, 275–76)

The patriotism expressed in *Richard II* is deeply felt and yet acquires aesthetic distance or perspective. Every syllable of John of Gaunt's speech is familiar as a household word, yet one is not tempted to make a political oration out of it. It is at a remove from Elizabethan court and council, just as the Finlandia of Sibelius transcends the doings of unfortunate politicians in Helsinki.

In time of danger Shakespeare's countrymen can never forget his version of "The Happy Warrior," his vision of the country they defend. But when they are fighting for democracy and human rights, they ask Shakespeare for more than that, and seek in him confirmation of their dearest political beliefs. Thus the vexed question of Shakespeare and democracy cannot be separated from the subject of Shakespeare and the national spirit. There is a fundamental issue here which arises with all the great modern poets. Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson, yes, and Goethe—we want them all on our side, and that means that we seek in them the better part of

liberalism. When Browning in "The Lost Leader" reproached Wordsworth with apostasy from liberal ideals, he exclaimed:

> Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
> Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch from their graves!

This does not mean that Shakespeare, Milton, Burns, and Shelley could get together easily in a compact little political caucus. Where would Shakespeare and Shelley find common political ground? Shelley was a revolutionist, but Shakespeare has been variously represented as a defender of the old feudal order, an admirer of the aggrandized Tudor monarchy, as a man who held the ordinary political beliefs of his day and as a genius who anticipated liberal doctrines. Though it may be impossible to get at Shakespeare's private thoughts and opinions, the plays seem to take some such view as this of the body politic: the king may go wrong, and that is a national tragedy; the popular assembly or the mob is always wrong, and that way anarchy lies. Leaders of faction, whether brawling aristocrats or bawling demagogues, are enemies of the commonwealth, which can survive and flourish only under the ordered regimen of a wise monarch. Yet any such brief statement may put the emphasis in the wrong place, and essential qualifications have to be made. Shakespeare's contempt for the mob is outweighed by his penetrating sympathy for the common man; Shakespeare's inevitable acceptance of royalty and aristocracy does not commit him to the servile follies that came with the acceptance of the doctrine of the divine right of kings. His own inclination and the stresses of the time led him to emphasize a strong and ordered state, but he is not so much taken up with formulas that they harden on his hands. The whole question of Shakespeare's democracy is often discussed in terms that do not fit his age. He would

probably think of a political party, even a party with a sensible platform, as a mischievous faction. Neither is it clear that Shakespeare ever explicitly accepted the doctrine of the state expounded by his great contemporary Hooker, the conception of a law both natural and rational, valid for and limiting both king and people. As far as Shakespeare thought about these things at all he probably thought in terms of kingship rather than in terms of natural law. That would be closer to his accepted idiom. It is enough that later generations of Englishmen were not conscious of any essential conflict between Shakespeare and Hooker, but in order to accept them both it is not necessary to make Shakespeare into a statist. "What attracts men to one another is not a common point of view, but consanguinity of spirit," says Marcel Proust.

As we pass from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, we find that at first the poets who dwell on the greatness of England see the reign of Elizabeth in an historical perspective which comes to be all the more attractive because of the contrast with later troubles. The seventeenth century was not quiet, but it was capable of quiet and spacious imagination, as, for example, in a few lines which put in a cosmic setting the turbulent career of the great Elizabethan seaman Drake:

> Sir Drake, whom well the world's end knew,
> Which thou didst compass round,
> And whom both Poles of Heaven once saw,
> Which North and South do bound,
> The stars above would make thee known,
> If men here silent were;
> The sun himself cannot forget
> His fellow traveller.
>
> (*Wit's Recreations,* 1640)

A forgotten poet of the seventeenth century, Samuel Daniel, was perhaps the first to formulate the connection of Eliza-

bethan literature with national life and with what would later have been called the imperialistic ideal. "Late Eliza's reign" has given birth to more poets, he says, than all that went before; national pride sets native poets above those of France and Italy, and as for the future:

> Who, in time, knows whither we may vent
> The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores
> This gain of our best glory shall be sent,
> T' enrich unknowing nations with our stores?
> What worlds in th' yet unformed Occident
> May come refin'd with th' accents that are ours?
> Or who can tell for what great work in hand
> The greatness of our style is now ordain'd?
>
> (*Musophilus,* 1602–03)

Daniel is in the great tradition, and in a sense his vision of the future may still be coming true, but the following generations, far from confirming these high hopes, tore England apart in civil war. The reign of Elizabeth had been an uneasy truce; the succeeding Stuart kings lost the art of compromise and inclusion which is the life of politics, and the people of England took sides in the greatest and most tragic national cleavage since the Wars of the Roses. "The art of free society," says Whitehead, "consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code, and secondly in fearlessness of revision, to secure that the code serves those purposes which satisfy an enlightened reason."[1] The seventeenth century, then, was an age of fearless revision under the pressure of more or less enlightened reason. But, continuing to use Whitehead's terms, we think of the national poets as primarily concerned with "the maintenance of the symbolic code." If reason destroys the symbol, where will the national poet be? If the age forces him to take sides in a struggle about symbols, how far can he be national?

[1] A. N. Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (New York, 1927), p. 88.

Shakespeare, living in an age when the established order was successfully maintaining itself, was not confronted with such a choice. But in the age of Milton we come upon the poet as partisan.

The demand for revision of the code has usually been made in the name of liberty, and, when pushed far enough, leads to revolution, to mortal conflict with the old order. The old is concrete, entangled in rich associations, embodied in institutions; the new is abstract, relatively free of entangling associations, embodied in a formula. One of the most familiar generalizations about the Englishman is that he is inclined to deal with situations rather than theories, and suffers acute embarrassment when asked to analyze the assumptions on which his daily life may be supposed to rest. Professor Macneile Dixon tells a story about a Scot who, when he heard someone venturing to praise the English, asked doubtfully, "Have you ever been able to engage any of them in a metapheesical discussion?" But a good many Englishmen had their fling at this kind of thing in the seventeenth century, and patriotism was apparently superseded by politics. Political discussion is abstract and controversial; it argues principles and then passes to personalities and tries to down the opponent. Amid the babel of voices in the controversies of the 1640's it is sometimes hard to hear the voice of England. Something must block or limit the ardor of the partisan, "resolved to ruin or to rule the state." Shakespeare had hardly given a name to the indispensable political check, but had personified it in the wise and potent head of the state. Burke was to call it "prejudice"; Tennyson was to speak of "the common sense of most" which "holds a fruitful realm in awe." Milton was disposed to call it the law or reason which the virtuous man accepts, possesses, and expresses, and for which he fights. An England

ruled by this reason would rightly receive and deserve the patriot's devotion. An England which fell short of this ideal, as Milton came to think his country did, would turn the patriot's hopes into lamentations over her apostasy. An abstract politico-religious standard or ideal is at times given priority over the country itself, the England which is felt and imagined rather than made the object of speculation. In the 1640's Milton seems to have felt that when God wanted something done he turned to his Englishmen, and in the *Areopagitica* he argues for freedom of thought and utterance as at the same time due to the power of reason and congenital to the English. This power, however, is not canonized in the past but is to be recognized and realized in the immediate future to which the youthful Milton looks. The famous personification of England in the *Areopagitica* is not inspired by veneration of her ancient glories, but by a deep sense of the potential power of youth—"a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks"—"an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam." The sense of freedom and power is magnificent, but this nation is at the same time subject to the judgment of the free and enlightened individual. If this individual approves the execution of Charles (as Milton and Cromwell did), and the nation refuses to approve the execution of Charles (as the nation undoubtedly did refuse), then what becomes of God's Englishmen? Both the workaday business of the state and its highest interests require that it be taken as a going concern, with a past and a future, no matter what the mistakes of its politicians and prophets may be. If these mistakes are hopeless and irretrievable, or are considered to be so, then political life breaks down—there is a fatal breach of continuity. To some

such impasse Milton brought himself. It must be added that it was the whole tragic process of seventeenth-century politics that brought home to the Anglo-Saxon world the necessity of a working compromise, however irrational, between order and liberty; the errors of Milton and Cromwell were an essential contribution to our political wisdom.

Even so, it may be objected that this statement of the case simply disregards Milton the English poet. Something needful for a balanced estimate has been omitted. Many a reader will feel a "consanguinity of spirit" with Milton, and may hold to the opinion that he had rather be wrong with Milton than right with someone else. As Shelley says in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound,* "I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus." It is impossible to separate the religious, the political, and the literary aspects of Milton's career, though an attempt to put them into a single scheme involves us in some strange difficulties about Milton's attitude toward tradition and authority. Without getting entangled in these difficulties, we find that we do not actually have in the seventeenth century the sharp break with tradition which the neat antitheses of the popular historian sometimes suggest. As an epic poet no one labors more seriously than Milton with the combined traditions of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. In his early plans for an epic poem he duly considers the established theme of the story of the British Arthur and his return and triumph in modern British history. Such a subject would have made him the heir of Elizabethan patriotism. But he abandoned it and wrote instead the epic of the fall of man. It is hard to discuss works which were never written, and to weigh motives in this shift of literary plans. The national theme was dropped perhaps in his disappointment at what England was actually

doing: the broader epic theme of man's religious destiny was adopted perhaps under the irresistible pressure of modern European culture. We are left with the solitary and tragic figure of man involved in a great historic drama which depends in some inscrutable way upon his reason and his will, and, somehow identified with this, the figure of the poet, apparently defeated by the conjuncture of the times, yet uttering his prophecies to unawakened earth. Just as Englishmen have refused to take Shakespeare as narrowly Tory, so, once the heat of partisan conflict died down, they have refused to identify Milton with any 17th-century faction.

If we try to follow the expression of English nationality into the Restoration and the eighteenth century, we find that what is usually said to be the spirit of the period might seem to make against the highest patriotism. We are told that the literary imagination failed or dwindled, so that poets were no longer capable of the great syntheses made by Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. People came to prefer the useful and the sensible to the daring, the irrational, and the sublime. We enter a modern world primarily of economic activity and secondarily of political strife. The Englishman is more and more occupied with commerce and trade, and the shrewd and self-seeking practicality of the middle class comes more and more to give the tone to the nation. The dangers of attack from without and disruption from within are much more remote, and Englishmen are for the most part free to mind their own business, to develop within limits their own excellent differences, and to expend their energy in miscellaneous kinds of social and humanitarian activity which come to be highly characteristic. The bloodless Revolution of 1688 established the British polity as we now know it, and Englishmen of almost all classes and interests seemed to be united in accepting Sir Robert Wal-

pole's principle of *quieta non movere*—"Let sleeping dogs lie." Anything drastic would probably be bad for the landed interest and for trade. The English national character as we now know it gets its characteristic set from this period. The traditional caricature of John Bull dates from the reign of Queen Anne. Country and town, though not of course the great cities, took on the aspect we still know and will always remember, and down to the late nineteenth century at least, indeed down to 1940, a visitor returning from the eighteenth century would probably have been able to find his way about. Meanwhile British sea-power, along with commerce and industry, was building the Empire. The wavering fortunes of war, business, and politics, and the boundless license of political and social satire seem during this period to conceal at a given time England's great gains in power, wealth, and prestige. The Englishman who presumed on his power and wealth would find that there was always a compatriot nearby ready to hurl invective at him, no matter how much he was getting and accomplishing. The Whig grandees entrenched in political privilege, the nabob who had just made his pile in the East, the beneficiaries of the Industrial Revolution were bitterly resented and savagely satirized. Many Englishmen deserved well of their country, but the nation did not make heroes easily. Marlborough was one of the greatest generals of all time, and won an unparalleled series of victories on the Continent, yet he was never a national hero in the sense that he was adopted by the folk. The intriguing politicians who played for power during a great part of the century, whatever side they were on, the Whigs Walpole and Carteret or the Tory Bolingbroke, commanded almost no disinterested loyalty or enthusiasm. The royal family was often viewed with imperfect sympathy or even utter disrespect.

At the same time the current satire was partly counterbalanced by an official literature of eulogy. This period saw a systematic glorification of the political and economic position of Britain in what is called "Whig panegyric verse." The eighteenth century had a way of putting into verse what we might now put into an editorial or an article. We are likely to dismiss all such work as tepid and insincere, and to turn wearily away from a long succession of mediocre poets laureate. Our own experiences during the last few years have taught us a distrust of all heady optimisms based on a supposed national security. But if these forgotten poems about Britain's glory repel us ("Rule Britannia," by James Thomson, is the only one which has survived in the memory of the English-speaking world), we should remember that important facts and forces underlie the bad verse and the heavy complacency. The ideas of Whig panegyric, when translated into our own idiom, would command general assent today. The value of the settlement of 1688 and its guarantee of political rights and liberties, the importance of a benevolent and just policy in domestic and foreign affairs—such ideals cannot and will not be questioned. We may attack the sincerity of those who profess them, but that is a different thing. Along with the praise of Whig ideals there is found a more abstract expression of patriotic spirit, couched in neo-classical phrase. The conception of a free state to which heroic men devote themselves in life and death, the theme of ancient liberty, had been drawn from the classical tradition and inculcated by the schools of western Europe since the Renaissance. Plutarch's *Lives* set the model for the patriot. The tradition assumed the dignity of a philosophy of history: the arts, the sciences, and commerce flourish only in a free state. On this platform of liberty Whig and Tory could meet, and both parties turned

out to applaud Addison's famous drama, *Cato*. Cato fought and died in opposition to tyranny and in the cause of the true Rome. The sententious lines of the play combine a noble if arid stoicism with patriotic devotion:

> 'Tis not in mortals to command success,
> But we'll do more, Sempronius, we'll deserve it.
>
> It is not now a time to talk of aught
> But chains or conquest, liberty or death.

This neo-classical idiom, though often mingled with the bombast and rhetoric of Whig panegyric, can be at its best abstracted from self-praise and self-interest and set up as an ideal which men can never despise. It can be found persisting in the literature of political opposition, particularly in the opposition to Walpole, and in the sententious utterances of the age of the American Revolution. For generations it colored political discourse on both sides of the Atlantic, and an American example may serve to bring home its significance. When George Washington planned to distribute his swords among his nephews, he wrote in his will:

> These Swords are accompanied with an injunction not to unsheath them for the purpose of shedding blood, except it be for self defence, or in defence of their Country and its rights; and in the latter case, to keep them unsheathed, and prefer falling with them in their hands, to the relinquishment thereof.[1]

The impact of these words at this later day—"keep them unsheathed"—may show us that the relatively dry and abstract utterance of the eighteenth century can still have peculiar power. At its best it formulates in terms which we have inherited an ideal of freedom for men everywhere who earn it and continue to deserve it, an ideal which may yet play a decisive part in the history of the world.

We have frequently been reminded of late that if Whig panegyric (or say the self-praise of the ruling class) over-

[1] *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, 1940), XXXVII, 288.

looks some of the facts or finds it convenient to forget them, abstract formulas about liberty seem to overlook others. These flaws or limitations in the eighteenth-century view did not become manifest until a time when the state was in danger. In the generations which witnessed the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the campaigns of Napoleon, Britain was forced to consider the weakness of her colonial system, to seek to justify conservatism as against thorough-going political and social reform, and finally to look to her defenses in the face of imminent danger from the Continent. Britain accepted the American Revolution, rejected with horror the French Revolution, and then turned to face Napoleon. In the first two phases the voice of England may be heard in Edmund Burke; in the last phase a man from the north, William Wordsworth, found the noblest speech for his nation.

There is a stateliness about the patriotic utterances of Burke and Wordsworth which still shows the neo-classical idiom, the Roman *gravitas,* and connects closely with the traditional style of public utterance. Wordsworth, in the sonnets of 1802 and the following years, reached back to the seventeenth century:

> Great men have been among us; hands that penned
> And tongues that uttered wisdom—better none:
> The later Sidney, Marvell, Harrington,
> Young Vane, and others who called Milton friend.

The continuity and inclusiveness of this tradition should not, however, obscure the fact that at the end of the eighteenth century we make the transition to a more highly nationalistic philosophy of history. Toryism finds articulate expression. Burke considers dogmas about the rights of man meaningless in comparison with the slow accumulated pressure of national tradition. The state is not an idea or a blueprint, but

a living thing, immersed in experience and constituted by the indissoluble links that bind generation to generation. Political life can never transcend this experience, and only in this palpable medium can Burke find any solution of the eternal problem of reconciling liberty and order. The answer that he gave to this problem at the time of the American Revolution can be called Whig; the answer that he gave at the time of the French Revolution can be called Tory. He was so much concerned with dangers and errors that at any given moment we may think of him as a political controversialist on a grand scale, and Goldsmith once said that he gave up to party what was meant for mankind. The eloquent defender of things as they are out-laments Jeremiah when it becomes quite clear that things aren't going to be as they are. But Burke anticipates in his conception of the life of the state the new national self-consciousness that appeared in Europe during the Napoleonic era, and he finds the only sound basis for politics in the historical imagination which was about to transform European literature.

The actual appearance of this consciousness in English literature is most memorably expressed in Wordsworth's writings in the decade from 1802. In his earlier years an enthusiast for the French Revolution, in his later years a bigoted Tory, Wordsworth was in this middle period at the actual spiritual center of the nation's life. Here he attained a centrality which was more than popularity. (If it comes to that, Thomas Campbell's excellent martial lyrics, "Ye Mariners of England" and "The Battle of the Baltic," were more popular during these years than any of Wordsworth's verses.) Wordsworth's poetry records with great delicacy varying shades of thought and feeling, and here we can trace his change from a doctrinaire internationalism, first to a patriotic interpretation of deep local attachments—

I travelled among unknown men,
Beyond an unknown sea,
Nor, England, did I know till then
What love I bore to thee—

and then, after his French visit of 1802, to the final expression of his patriotism in the great sonnets which for nobility of accent stand unmatched in English literature since Milton. The familiar lines need not be quoted in full—"man's unconquerable mind," "the homely beauty of the good old cause," "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour."

Two Voices are there; one is of the sea,
One of the mountains; each a mighty Voice:
In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty!
("Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland")

A generation ago commentators found some of Wordsworth's utterances too militaristic. They were, for example, shocked at the sentiments expressed in the sonnets headed "October 1803"—"Shout, for a mighty Victory is won!" As we read these lines over now after Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain, we can recover Wordsworth's spirit and share his attitude more completely than any generation since his own. Then as now, England's implacable enemy was mustering invasion forces at the Channel ports; then as in the Battle of Britain the men of Kent might be called the "Vanguard of Liberty," and it seemed as though the destiny of the Empire might depend on that little southeastern corner of English ground. It is all very well to explain that Wordsworth's "Character of the Happy Warrior" is not merely a eulogy of the military life, but we can now shift the emphasis and say that the military life is an essential part of what it eulogizes. The patriot must have courage along with wisdom and steadfastness. And it should be noted that even in the crisis of 1802 and 1803 Wordsworth's criticism of his country is

sometimes candid to the point of bitterness. His poetry honestly records thoughts and experiences, and sets down his awareness of national weakness and error. At times he can fear that England's powers are sapped by "rapine, avarice, expense." He can even write of Britain in terms which might be quoted by the most unsparing critics of her policy of colonization and conquest:

> England! the time is come when thou shouldst wean
> Thy heart from its emasculating food;
> The truth should now be better understood;
> Old things have been unsettled; we have seen
> Fair seed-time, better harvest might have been
> But for thy trespasses; and, at this day,
> If for Greece, Egypt, India, Africa,
> Aught good were destined, thou wouldst step between.
> England! all nations in this charge agree:
> But worse, more ignorant in love and hate,
> Far—far more abject, is thine Enemy:
> Therefore the wise pray for thee, though the freight
> Of thy offences be a heavy weight:
> Oh grief that Earth's best hopes rest all with Thee!

The last line is not Wordsworth's last word, and about this same time he called such fears "unfilial." But his fears and misgivings were in the record, and he let them stand. The severity and austerity of this national self-searching is Miltonic, and comes down through Wordsworth, even through Kipling's "Recessional," to our own day. England's foes have long misunderstood and misinterpreted this strain of stringent Puritanism in the national spirit.

The ordeal of the English continued even after the victory of Trafalgar had removed the threat of invasion, and the terrible progress of the aggressor then as now raised the question of England's attitude toward the temporarily subject nations of the Continent. The theme of the integrity and nobility of the nations in this tragic plight takes definitive form in Wordsworth's great prose tract, *The Conven-*

tion of Cintra (1809). Wordsworth's patriotic utterances, like Churchill's great speeches, are by no means improvisations in a crisis or uncritical eulogies. They were wrought through hard years; they have back of them the great tradition, and have been matured by the full-blooded patriotism of the Elizabethans, the political doctrines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such a synopsis, omitting just the nineteenth century, the age of Britain's greatest material and political power and a time of high literary achievement, is drastically simplified, but Wordsworth gives us a vantage ground from which we can survey the national past and realize how the past lives in the present.

> It is not to be thought of that the Flood
> Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
> Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
> Hath flowed, "with pomp of waters, unwithstood,"
> Roused though it be full often to a mood
> Which spurns the check of salutary bands,
> That this most famous Stream in bogs and sands
> Should perish; and to evil and to good
> Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
> Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:
> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
> Which Milton held.—In everything we are sprung
> Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

And as a pendant to these lines, bringing them nearer to our own place and time, let me end with a less familiar sonnet by a mid-Victorian poet, Sydney Dobell, addressed to America:

> Nor force nor fraud shall sunder us! Oh ye
> Who north or south, on east or western land,
> Native to noble sounds, say truth for truth,
> Freedom for freedom, love for love and God
> For God; Oh ye who in eternal youth
> Speak with a living and creative flood
> This universal English, and do stand

Its breathing book; live worthy of that grand
Heroic utterance—parted, yet a whole,
Far, yet unsevered,—children brave and free
Of the great Mother-tongue, and ye shall be
Lords of an Empire wide as Shakespeare's soul,
Sublime as Milton's immemorial theme,
And rich as Chaucer's speech, and fair as Spenser's dream.
("America," *Sonnets on the War,* 1855)

ALAN D. MCKILLOP.